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THE supposed Aboriginal inhabitants of America, present to the eye of the observer an anomaly in the History of Man. When the fanciful hyperboles of the early discoverers are discarded, emblazoned as they were by the exaggerated narrations of contemporary writers; and the

theories of philosophers, reared in the clouds of their imaginations, are regarded as the baseless fabric of a vision; when we have smiled at the credulity of those French savans, who could believe everything but the revelation of God, and put credit in the most absurd accounts, and most improbable speculations, while they threw the whole force of their ridicule, their abhorrence, and their blasphemy, upon the simple relations and sublime doctrines of the Bible; who clapped the Esquimaux, described as being destitute of beards, with the Satyrs of old and other ambiguous monsters which have perished, with the Hottentots, the Troglodytes, & the Albinos; who believed that a race of the latter existed on the Withnus of Panama; who believed that our sheep were lions, and ~~our lions sheep~~ that our lions were sheep; who believed in fine all the fables of Patagonia and

Amazonia – the guardian giants of the eastern coast – the armed bands of military females – and the golden roofs of the imaginary El Dorado; – when we have discarded all this romance, and all the ingenious hypotheses which have made out the patent for our physical, intellectual, and moral degeneracy; – still there is a greater subject left us for wonder, in the mysterious origin, singular moral character, and rapid disappearance of the melancholy wanderers of our forests, than ever amused the brain of Lapiteau, Buffon, or Voltaire.

Perhaps no nation, or set of men ever existed, to trace whose origin conjecture itself fails so entirely as it does in considering whence sprung the numerous tribes of American Indians; and how such a vast continent was peopled with a race as remote in mind and manners from the rest of mankind as they are

in situation of country. Other nations have arisen, run their short or their more extended career of glory or dishonor, sunk into the darkness from which they sprung, or gone on, adding to the greatness of their fame, and the lustre of their achievements, till the whole earth was brightened by their resplgence; — and the researches of antiquarians, the theories of the learned, or the voice of historic testimony have enabled us to form at least a probable, often a certain estimate of their origin. Even the mysterious sources of Egypt, China, and Hindostan, are not lost in total obscurity; like the mountain of gold, which the extraordinary mythology of the Hindoo fabulists has assigned as the centre of the terrestrial system, they gleam through the tide of ages, and the darkness of progressive revolutions, though human perceptions cannot precisely determine their origin and situation. The unwarrantable but sublime

hypotheses of M. Baillie have been discarded, while the labors of other less fanciful and equally indefatigable investigators of the turbid current of time, have in a considerable degree rendered our ideas of these dubious subjects more fixed and certain. But on the Indians of america, no single ray sheds down its beam of light, to illuminate the darkness of the past. They have slumbered on in midnight and obscurity, and when the enterprise of civilized man at length discovered their distant home, history had no tale to disclose, and tradition no intelligence to reveal. In what was so long supposed a wild and weary waste of waters, tribes and nations were rising and perishing, and no record remained to say that they had even existed. Imagination has traced in them resemblances to many nations of the east;— some scarce intelligible customs

remind us of other realms; and certain characteristics of language seem to betoken an affinity to those tongues which we have been accustomed to venerate, though long since perished from the earth. We shall not pretend to account for these coincidences; they may have been accidental; and at any rate, it is useless to conjecture where we have no possible clue to guide us in our investigations. From the north to the south, strange remains have been discovered of past days, far surpassing any effort ever attempted by the Indians of our remembrance;— lofty tombs, and regular fortifications, and sculptured stones,* seem to point back our gaze to something far behind. Perhaps, some mighty nation, migrating from the early civilization of Asia, has past the narrow strait that

* On the Missouri, in Ohio, on Hunton river, Mass. & other places: These remains have been seen, & still exist.

separated the two continents, in quest of some remote abode where they might dwell in peace and safety; and scattering their tribes as they proceeded, who by degrees became lost all resemblance to their ancestors in knowledge or art, at last reared the wonderful empires of Mexico and Peru, and handed down to posterity a portion of their civilisation & intelligence.

Indeed the gradual increase of intelligence, with the exception of a very few tribes, as we approach to the south, argues in favor of this. In the cold and inhospitable regions of the north, their character is in general a strange mixture of indifference, and gloom, and lofty heroism, and savage ferocity; while further south, they seem to have retained more of their former customs, and to have better ideas of government, polity, and religion.

Upon the Indians of our own country, civilisation has had little effect. The savage indifference of their spirits seems to be incapable of being softened by the refinements of society; or else they have braced their nerves, & steeled their hearts against receiving any thing from men, whom they must consider as the invaders of their rights, & the usurpers of their domain. They will not be tamed by severity, nor melted by kindness. The war-whoop that still swells upon our western borders tells how bitter are their feelings, how thirsty their revenge. In those parts where they have been effectually subdued, their spirit betrays itself on every occasion. Stratagem and petty pride supply the place of open hostility; and the Indian character is thus rendered as base & despicable as it was once entitled to respect and admiration for many of its qualities.

Fallen and degraded as they now appear in their state of squalid

wretchedness and ignominious seclusion, herding together like beasts, and as it were shut out from all the comforts and blessings of society, let none deny them the tribute of applause for their genius & their heroism. We have been accustomed to behold the Indian character under every possible disadvantage, misrepresented by prejudice, distorted by malice, clouded by the slander of that fanatic bigotry, which instead of seeking to bring them into the paths of peace & holiness and joy, only poured the wild wave of exterminating warfare, as if they were pests to the land, and monsters on the earth. But it is now high time to lay aside this patchwork veil of prejudice, malice, and bigotry. It is time to behold them as they were, great, and unfortunate, lofty, and humbled to the dust. Is there no genius in the eloquence which has been heard among the high spirited

chieftains of the six nations of New York? Is their heroic valor, their dignified deportment, their burning language, and their undaunted firmness, only to meet with the cold-blooded censure of prejudice & malevolence? Is Sparta to be handed down as an object of admiration, and a theme of applause, to the long ages of futurity, and these poor wanderers, merely because they were the objects of hatred to the conquering grasp of avarice & ambition and intolerant zeal, only to be set up as the mock & the gaze of all mankind?

Perhaps few men ever exiled, with the same limited advantages, and the same genius to surmount them, as the Eastern chieftain, commonly known as King Philip. Stung to madness by the invasion and possession of territories which nature had bestowed upon his countrymen, he rose in all the terror of his strength, and spread dismay & desolation wherever he

appeared. Because he broke treaties which it was impossible to observe; because he rose up in indignation against the oppression that demanded all and gave nothing in return; because he opposed that religion which its professors never imparted to the unhappy Indians, and which their own conduct disgraced, and gave occasion for its reproach, being so entirely opposite to the purest precepts it inculcates; because he did these things, he was branded with the name of Rebel, and Apostate, a price was set upon his head, and he was hunted down to death like the wild wolf of the forest. In his real character, he may indeed be considered, as a bold, heroic, bad man; of uncommon genius, and great enterprise; as one who scrupled little at what means he took for the accomplishment of his ends;- but we are to make many allowances, and to remember that revenge and treachery were

considered no crimes in the Indian miserable code of morality, and particularly roused as they were by the cruelty and fraud of their invaders. Had Philip lived in the days of Lacedemon, he would have been elebrated as a hero of no common stamp; his genius kept his enemies at bay for a long time; and he certainly deserved a better fate, than to be butchered in a swamp, and have his mangled body distributed in ghastly triumph throughout the country. the members of

But in vain shall we now look for anything like these features of Indian character;- in vain, we shall soon have to say, shall we look even for the descendants of these perished heroes. Like the scattered leaves of autumn, they lie in the dust, to be swept away by the wintry blast that is gathering. Every year lessens their numbers, & enfeebles their energies. Of the tribes that were not long

since the most powerful, and great, and numerous, the scattered remains now present but a miserable mockery of the past. Wherever the foot of civilisation treads, they fade like the wreathing mists of the morning from the mountain's brow. The forests that once re-echoed to their shouts, the hills over which their nimble forms once bounded, the streams where their light canoes once floated in proud delight, now scarcely behold a solitary straggler to recall the memory of past days. No - they have perished, & must perish all; without hope, or remedy, or recall. The sword of war, the exterminating hand of violence; the diseases which civilisation has introduced, while its blessings are forgotten; the broken spirits, the separated tribes, of the unhappy natives; all tend to swell the catalogue of their woes, and hasten their destruction from the face of the

earth. The land that should have been their own will entomb them within its bosom, and give them that last sad refuge of ruined humanity; that mighty sepulchre shall hide within its gloomy mansions the desolated hopes, the vanished fears, the sighs, & tears, & sorrows, which have past forever; and hearts that might have throbbed to something higher & purer, & more holy, shall there find that

——"calm for those who weep,
——"Low in the ground."

As their origin was mysterious and unaccountable, so in all probability their fate will be quick & strange; and when future ages look back to the history of these times, they will wonder at the tale of those, who rose in darkness, and set in deeper night; who were discovered only to be exterminated, and who shall have existed only to call forth the surprise

of the world, lost forever in the rapid current of ages. When the last of the Indians shall have expired; when the only remaining descendant of a parted race shall have gone to the sad home of his fathers; perhaps some listening ear may distinguish among his dying groans — "not a drop of "my blood flows in the veins of "one human being. Is there one "to mourn for Logan? — No — "not one!" ___ *

E.

* See Jefferson's notes on Virginia.